

cmc/Cuban Con

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\cmc\Notes for NBC program on CII
2 September 1992

Notes on John Newhouse, "A Reporter at Large: Socialism or Death"
New Yorker, April 27, 1992

Unlearned lessons of crisis:

--"Operation Mongoose, which included opera-bouffe attempts to do away with Castrol, plus acts of sabotage against his realm."

Real role of Mongoose; where it was expected to lead, what was regarded as necessary to achieve its goals, its real function in preparing for invasion; its actual scale. Its role in causing, justifying Soviet moves, crisis.

LESSONS OF CRISIS

--"the world had been much closer to nuclear war in 1962 than even anyone in Washington had thought." (Presence of nuclear warheads with Soviets).

q2
(w.87)

See other reasons why I have thought this.

✓ --Soviets had sent 42,000 troops to Cuba (CIA had estimated 10,000 (when?); "Never before in Russian history had we sent so many people across the ocean." (General Gribkov).

? 1 Given willingness to do this, to repel an American invasion: why not announce it (at least, after they had arrived) as deterrent; and why not rely on this alone?

Perhaps the answer to the latter question is, as in the case of American troops in Europe: "We can't put (so many) Soviet troops at risk without 'protecting' them with tactical nuclear weapons." ("Confronting a nuclear-armed enemy, with superior conventional forces.") Of course, the opponent also had tactical nuclear weapons, in fact, more of them; but that was also true facing American troops in NATO!

The Soviets failed to make any effort to deter American attack by making the presence of Soviet troops or nuclear warheads known publicly--even after they had arrived, in a successful fait accompli. Not all the warheads had arrived, nor all the missiles, but given that twenty missiles had nuclear warheads, the fait accompli was more successful--temporarily--than the Americans ever knew, till now.

irrat. Would JFK have had RFK deliver his ultimatum on Saturday night if he had known that twenty of the missiles had nuclear warheads? Might not Khrushchev have deterred this ultimatum, and induced JFK to make a public trade, if he had announced this, or demonstrated it? Why didn't he? Likewise, for the Soviet troops. This announcement was an option as a response to RFK's threat. But Khrushchev didn't have time to try this, safely, given the "second ultimatum" about shooting down recon planes, and Khrushchev's loss of control!

Lat. right, too late!

In other words, Khrushchev had two very powerful hidden cards to play as of Saturday night: but no time to play them, given Castro's shooting. If he could have reliably gotten Castro to stop shooting (as JFK presumed he could)...

and his Dead Hand!
Indeed, it is mysterious why he didn't play them earlier. But the failure to attempt to deter with this public announcement, instead keeping these preparations to respond secret, is like the episode in Dr. Strangelove (1964?) when the Soviet premier reveals that he has prepared a Domsday Machine, without yet having gotten around to informing the Americans of it. This is what Khrushchev had done, with his secret troops and tactical nuclear weapons and strategic warheads! Kubrick's satire, surrealism, cynicism, was merely mirroring what had actually occurred two years earlier!

(not known - 1992) An equivalent would have been if Saddam had, in fact, prepared a nuclear weapon for delivery, and kept it secret till he was attacked. (It is still not impossible that this actually occurred!).

To add to this: Gribkov revealed that "Soviet commanders in Cuba had been granted discretionary authority to alaunch the nuclear-armed short-range missiles if they were confronted by an American invasion force." 70 (This, too, could have been announced, for deterrence). Thus, McNamara's worries about unauthorized firing of strategic missiles by Soviet commanders did not exhaust the real risks; and underestimated the recklessness of the commanders in Moscow.

REFLECTIONS:

--[Why JFK is always described as calm: he knew he was going to settle, if necessary; but only after scaring everyone else enough that most would welcome a settlement, ask him to do it; or at least, a lot would, having been mobilized by the crisis to confront the right-wing which would have complained about a deal with or without a crisis.] *Lat. right*

and maybe R would fold.

--Castro seems to have views now that would support a Masada--or Jonestown!--complex: he "would prefer to see Cuba sink beneath the waves than compromise revolutionary principles." 53.

But during the crisis, he asked Khrushchev by letter to respond with a strategic strike (from Russia!) if the US invaded Cuba; that is, literally, Masada, or rather, Samson: mutual suicide, "If we go (i.e. if we are conquered: not destroyed) everything goes." What if his influence over local Soviet commanders had been similar to Cuba influence over the commander who ordered the SAM strike?

Newhouse asserts that "It took Khrushchev's entourage several years to convince him that it was not Castro but a Soviet air-defense unit that shot down a high-altitude American reconnaissance plane, the U-2, during the crisis...At the conference, Castro recalled receiving letters from Khrushchev complaining about the U-2 incident."

(See Khrushchev's account in his memoirs! So perhaps it wasn't so clear after all, even to the Soviets, who had ordered that! As the current contradictions still indicate. (Even if there had not been a firefight between Cubans and Soviets, or a takeover of SAM site).

Was it this letter from Castro that Khrushchev found so "alarming," as he announced in December? It would have indicated Castro's willingness to bring the house down: i.e., to keep shooting American planes!

Castro now said that "most people didn't want the missiles to be withdrawn. 'The truth is, we had been preparing for this day since the Sierra Maestra,' he claimed. 'People were saying goodbye to their children.'" Jonestown! (Which did happen).

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